



Title of the Best Practices Story: Living Nature and Ecotourism in the Park

Destination: Tibau do Sul, Praia de Pipa -Rio Grande do Norte

Country: Brasil

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Category:

- Destination Management
- Nature & Scenery
- Environment & Climate
- Culture & Tradition
- Thriving Communities
- Business and Marketing



Destination description:

Tibau do Sul, in the state of Rio Grande do Norte, Brazil, is a charming tourist destination, famous for its paradisiacal beaches, impressive cliffs and rich biodiversity. The city is home to the famous Praia da Pipa, known for its crystal clear waters, vibrant nightlife, welcoming atmosphere and today being the biggest driver of tourism in Rio Grande do Norte.

Tibau do Sul has stood out in the sustainable tourism scene, having achieved Green Destinations certification and its renewal. These certifications are a recognition of the destination's efforts in responsible tourism practices, environmental conservation and community development. The inclusion of Tibau do Sul in the list of Top 100 Sustainable Destinations highlights its leadership in sustainable tourism practices, for four consecutive years, having reached first place in the prosperous communities category in 2023.

Several local companies in Tibau do Sul also received sustainability certifications, standing out for their commitment to eco-friendly practices and social responsibility. These certifications help to promote more conscious and responsible tourism, benefiting the local community and preserving the environment.

Tibau do Sul is a shining example of how sustainability can be integrated into tourism to benefit both visitors and the local community. The various sustainability certifications obtained by the destination and its companies reinforce its commitment to the environment and sustainable development, making Tibau do Sul a prominent destination for sustainable tourism in Brazil.

Summary of the history of good practices:

The Mata da Pipa State Park – PEMP is an Integral Protection conservation unit, governed by State Decree and whose main objective is to protect a remnant of 290.88 hectares of Atlantic Forest in the Municipality of Tibau do Sul, in addition to enabling carrying out scientific research, environmental education and interpretation activities, leisure and ecological tourism.

The PEMP was created from the transformation of a territorial portion of the Bonfim-Guaráira Environmental Protection Area, with the aim of reinforcing the protection of its forests, known at the time as Matas da Pipa, which were suffering from real estate speculation, deforestation and invasions. The State Park is characterized by Mata da Pipa on top of dunes, exuberant in landscape and of great scenic beauty, presenting a great wealth and biodiversity of fauna and flora species from this important biome.

PEMP has its headquarters, whose facilities have great potential for use, promoting sociocultural aspects of neighboring communities and serving as a setting for non-formal education with the children of Tibau do Sul.



Problems faced:

The Municipality of Tibau do Sul has been one of the main tourist destinations in Rio Grande do Norte for some years, which naturally led to a need for new developments and buildings to occupy the region. Combined with the fame of its beaches, especially Pipa beach, this occupation was concentrated more intensely on the beach strip, causing the originally fishing community to move progressively towards the interior of the municipality. This area corresponded to regions that were still forested, where residents began to look for alternative sources of income, such as agriculture.

According to reports from natives, this migration to areas closer to the Pipa forests resulted in a significant increase in deforestation and exploitation of the Atlantic Forest, affecting its fauna and flora.

Solution:

The exploration of the Atlantic Forest in the municipality of Tibau do Sul made local NGOs (such as the Núcleo Ecológico de Pipa – NEP), the State Committee for the Atlantic Forest Biosphere Reserve – CERBMA/RN, universities and state and federal environmental agencies think in strategies that guaranteed greater protection of the area, leading to the creation of a Conservation Unit of the Integral Protection type and the Park category, to safeguard the Forests that were at risk of being occupied. In September 2006, based on State Decree No. 19,341, the State of Rio Grande do Norte created the Mata da Pipa State Park – PEMP under the management of the Institute for Sustainable Development and the Environment of Rio Grande do Norte – IDEMA, in an area of 290.88 hectares of Atlantic Forest on top of dunes.

After the creation of PEMP, several measures were taken to protect the area, such as fencing its perimeter, carrying out inspection, monitoring and environmental education actions, the latter carried out with the school community and the promotion of other actions and environmental and tourist events and, recently, the construction and inauguration of its Headquarters, open to visitors. All of these initiatives are aligned with the objectives of creating the PEMP, which aims at environmental conservation and also targets ecological tourism. As an Outpost of the Atlantic Forest Biosphere Reserve, PEMP promotes sustainable tourism, attracting visitors who value harmony with nature. This strengthens environmental awareness, integrating the local community in the process of preserving and enhancing natural heritage.



Methods, steps and tools applied:

To create the Mata da Pipa Ecological Park, it was necessary to observe important points for the process, such as:

- Observation of real estate growth and deforestation of native forest;
- Coordination between government entities;
- Public hearing;
- Delimitation of the protected area;
- Inspection;
- Construction of the Ecoposto.

The PEMP creation process involved several meetings with government entities (Institute of Sustainable Development and Environment of RN - IDEMA, Brazilian Institute of the Environment and Renewable Natural Resources - IBAMA, State Secretariat of Tourism - SETUR, Federal University of Rio Grande do Norte - UFRN, Municipality of Tibau do Sul, State Public Prosecutor's Office - CAOP-MA/MPRN, Federal Public Ministry - MPFP, Regional Management of the Union's Heritage - GRPU (current Superintendency of the Union's Heritage - SPU)) and the organized civil society (NGO Núcleo Ecológico da Pipa - NEP, State Biosphere Reserve Committee - CERBMA/RN, Pipa Community Council, Association of Residents and Friends of Pipa - AMAPIPA, Pipa Hoteliers Association, among others) including the realization Public Hearing and meetings at the State Environmental Council – CONEMA. This was an important step towards nature conservation, protecting one of the most threatened biomes in Brazil.

The PEMP was surrounded twice, the first time in 2008 and the most recent in 2017. For the latter, the geographical coordinates of its perimeter were followed according to its Descriptive Memorial. Meetings were held between internal sectors of IDEMA and between IDEMA, the Attorney General of the State of Rio Grande do Norte – PGE and the Environmental Policing Battalion of the Military Police of Rio Grande do Norte. Meetings were also held with the PEMP Management Council and a public meeting with the community, in May 2017. The work to fence the 11.7km perimeter of the Mata da Pipa State Park was carried out between the months of June and November 2017. The enclosure contributed to the physical delimitation of the protected area, in addition to making the Park better known to the community.

The development of environmental inspection and environmental education actions relies on partnerships between IDEMA and the Environmental Police Battalion – BPamb/PMRN and local schools, respectively. Inspection actions are planned between the Inspection sectors according to information and complaints regarding invasions, while environmental education activities are carried out in partnership with schools, being planned together.

The construction of the PEMP Headquarters was desired for many years by the community and the management council. In 2018, based on State Decree No. 27,901/2018, the State of Rio Grande do Norte declared an area for the construction of the Ecoposto do Parque Estadual Mata da Pipa to be of public utility, for expropriation purposes. From then on, the team from IDEMA's Architecture and Engineering Center prepared an architectural project, which was presented to the management council, and which went through the Environmental Licensing process. Its construction took place through Environmental Compensation resources, beginning in 2019, being halted due to the COVID-



19 pandemic, but being completed in June 2023, when it was inaugurated. The headquarters has the following buildings: guardhouse, Praça Quilombo de Sibaúma (which has a large space where it is possible to hold events, exhibitions, interactions and which has adapted bathrooms), the Administrative Headquarters (which has a common area, Library, Auditorium with capacity for 44 seats and adapted bathrooms), a seedling nursery (for planting native species in order to assist environmental restoration), a researcher support house (for the exclusive use of researchers with approved research at PEMP) and a support house for the Environmental Policing Battalion (with all the necessary infrastructure to accommodate police officers working in the conservation unit), as well as parking for buses, motorcycles and cars. There are spaces still to be worked on, such as the Children's Park, which is in the design phase, and the interpretive trails, which are in the final stage of structuring, for later opening to visitors. The headquarters has already hosted classes, film sessions and events, and still has a lot of potential to be explored, always complying with regulations, laws and regulations that involve a fully protected conservation unit.

In November 2023, on the occasion of the 32nd National Meeting of the Atlantic Forest Biosphere Reserve, the management of the Mata da Pipa State Park applied for the title of Outpost of the Atlantic Forest Biosphere Reserve. This work was carried out taking into account the activities that PEMP had been carrying out since before the inauguration of its headquarters, but which intensified with the inauguration of the infrastructure. For the Outpost title, the applicant must perform two of the three functions of the Atlantic Forest Biosphere Reserve: biodiversity conservation, sustainable development and traditional and scientific knowledge. Performing all three functions, and with great attractive potential, the headquarters of the conservation unit is today called the RBMA Outpost.

Achievements and Results:

With the creation of the Mata da Pipa State Park and its implementation as a protected area, a significant reduction in damage to vegetation within the perimeter established as a conservation unit was made possible. As it is an area created by the State through a legal act, with a special administration regime and defined limits (according to the National System of Nature Conservation Units – SNUC, Federal Law nº 9,985/2000) and considering that the Park category it does not allow the direct use of its resources and because it is in public possession and domain (private areas must be expropriated, according to the Law), the creation of the Park in itself already benefits the ecosystems it protects.

The fence refers to a physical delimitation of the area, which helps the community and visitors to understand that that space is important to exist and that it must be respected and protected.

Concomitant to this, inspection actions seek to curb invasions, while environmental education actions aim to make the population aware of the importance of the Park for the municipality, such as, for example, for regulating the local climate. The actions with schools became so intense that PEMP was part of the curriculum schedule of two Municipal schools, and this year 2024 it is working with two other schools in the Municipality, bringing knowledge about nature, socio-environmental preservation and sustainable use of resources and becoming a stage for education outside of school with projects such as CINE PEMP, where students use the Park space to watch films that address environmental/social themes.



The inauguration of the Ecoposto Headquarters at Mata da Pipa State Park was fundamental for the advancement of the conservation unit's actions. It should be noted that between the months of June and November 2023, PEMP received around 800 visitors.

The title of Outpost of the Atlantic Forest Biosphere Reserve is national and international recognition of the Park's actions via Headquarters. Ecoposto works as a disseminator of the concepts and programs developed by the Atlantic Forest Biosphere Reserve, consolidating the implementation of the MAB/UNESCO Program (The Man and the Biosphere).

Mata da Pipa State Park is in the final stages of preparing its Ecotourism Plan. From this Plan, it is intended to structure permitted and legal alternatives for the use of the area, making visitors aware of the importance and preservation of PEMP and the surrounding community with its socio-cultural values; promote knowledge and interaction with the environment without harming it and provide community involvement in their tourist activities, generating various benefits, valuing the well-being of communities and providing experiences for visitors and the local community.

Lessons learned and advice:

When dealing with environmental conservation and the protection of natural resources, persistence and consistency are essential; especially when linked to public entities. Sometimes the processes are bureaucratic, but formality, documentation and recording of the entire process are essential to create a story that will not be lost in the future. It is necessary to have partners, they are fundamental in several aspects and help the conservation unit to grow. And the partners range from the highest instance of the unit's management body, which must allow governance and autonomy in the management of the unit in daily aspects, through counselors, researchers, other public and private entities, and reaching the surrounding community and employees closer. Everyone is part of nature and everyone together can take care of it.

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